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**HOME**  
**IMPROVEMENT**

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# How to make renovation projects go smoothly



Homeowners are spending big bucks on home renovations. According to the Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University, home improvement project spending continues to increase. It's predicted to go from \$472 billion spent in 2022 to \$485 billion in 2024.

Those targeting a specific home renovation likely know there is much that goes into the process from start to finish.

Patience is a requisite virtue with any remodel, as even a thoroughly conceptualized plan can encounter a few bumps along the way. Although there is no way to completely remove renovation-related obstacles, there are ways to make projects go more smoothly.

• Establish a clear plan from the beginning. Now is not the time to be on the fence about details. A vision for the renovation is

essential, and should include details about layout, materials, colors, and design.

• Manage your expectations. Again, this speaks to a need for patience with a project but also involves flexibility. Being too rigid when choosing materials can require waiting for back-ordered supplies to come in. Wanting contractors to bend to your schedule can delay the project even further. Creativity and flexibility are key.

• Establish a budget. It can be easy to spend beyond one's means, especially when issues crop up. Black House Real Estate stresses the importance of creating a budget before starting a renovation, which may involve working with a local professional to help. Houzz advises preparing for worst-case scenarios by adding anywhere from 1 percent to 20 percent to the budget. Commit to sticking to the budget no matter what comes down the pike.

• Assemble a good team. Thoroughly research all contractors who will be involved with the renovation. These include designers, architects, builders, and more. Be sure they come highly recommended and

research online reviews. A good team removes some stress from the project because you'll know the work is in experienced hands.

• Prepare the space for the remodel. Any work you can do will help save on labor costs and make it easier for the team to get started on the project. Clear out clutter and personal items. Ask if it would be helpful for you to handle some demolition, whether that's pulling up old tile, removing drywall or another task.

• Have an escape hatch at the ready. Home renovations can cause upheaval to daily life, and that can mean stress on top of already chaotic schedules. If money and situation allow, plan a getaway during a particularly tough stretch of the project so the noise, mess, and disruptions will not induce headaches. Consider spending a few nights at a hotel or a friend or relative's house to escape the constant grind of the project.

Home renovation projects add value and functionality to homes. Such undertakings can go more smoothly with some sound planning.

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# The most popular rooms to remodel



Home improvement trends come and go. In a testament to that reality, the wildly popular open floor plan concepts that have dominated homeowners' desires over the last decade-plus could be falling out of favor, a shift that Rachel Stults of Realtor.com linked to the COVID-19 pandemic in a 2023 interview with Business Insider. Stults noted open floor plans will likely exhibit some measure of staying power, but linked the shift toward more traditional layouts to COVID lockdowns and the desire for more privacy among residents.

The shift away from open floor plans is a testament to the fleeting nature of home renovation trends. But trends still deserve a place at the table among real estate investors and homeowners who want to renovate their homes with an eye on projects that could be most appealing to prospective buyers. As homeowners balance their own preferences with those that might help them sell their homes down the road, they can consider this

list of the most popular rooms to renovate, courtesy of the "2024 U.S. Houzz & Home Study" from Houzz Research.

1. Kitchen
2. Guest bathroom
3. Primary bathroom
4. Living room
5. Guest bedroom
6. Primary bedroom
7. Laundry room
8. Closet
9. Dining room
10. Home office

When considering renovating these or other rooms, homeowners should know that Houzz researchers found that the median spend increased for most interior room upgrades compared to the previous year. However, the median cost to upgrade living rooms and home offices remained unchanged.

## Painting like a pro: 5 tips for a flawless finish

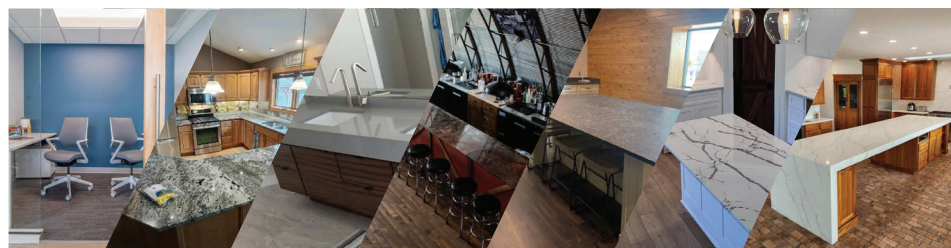
A beautiful paint job can transform your space. However, achieving a professional-looking finish can seem daunting. Don't worry! These five tips will have you wielding a brush like a pro in no time:

1. **Prep is key.** Before you start, prepare your walls properly. Patch holes, sand rough spots and remove dirt and cobwebs. A clean, smooth surface ensures the paint adheres evenly.
2. **Invest in quality tools.** Choose high-quality brushes with soft bristles and a fine-nap roller cover for smooth application. Use painter's tape to create clean lines around trim and edges.
3. **Master the loading technique.** Avoid overloading your roller – aim for a light, even coat. Roll in smooth, even strokes, applying light pressure. When using a brush, don't jab. Instead, use long, gentle strokes in one direction.
4. **Apply thin coats.** Applying two thin coats of paint is better than one thick one. Applying multiple coats allows each layer to dry properly, minimizing drips and creating a smooth, even finish.
5. **Clean as you go.** Take a damp cloth and wipe away splatters or drips throughout the process. Cleaning up minor mistakes as you go saves you time and frustration later.

Visit your local paint store for advice and to get the best tools for the job.



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## Simple home repairs that everyone should know, but few do

Calling a handyman for every minor inconvenience can get expensive. However, some quick fixes are surprisingly easy to tackle yourself. Here are a few essential home repairs that might surprise you with their simplicity:

1. Fixing a dripping faucet. A dripping faucet is annoying and wastes water and money. Most faucets can be fixed by replacing a worn-out washer — a simple task requiring a screwdriver and a trip to the hardware store.
2. Unclogging a drain. Before resorting to harsh chemicals to clear your pipes, try a plunger or a drain snake. A baking soda and vinegar solution can also work wonders.
3. Tightening loose doorknobs. A wobbly doorknob is more than inconvenient — it can be a security risk. Tightening the screws that hold the knob in place usually does the trick.
4. Seal drafty windows. Drafty windows can make your home feel chilly and drive up your energy bills. Seal the gaps with caulk and apply weatherstrip.
5. Drywall repair. All you need to patch small holes in your walls is spackle, a putty knife and sandpaper. That hole will be a distant memory with some filling, sanding and painting!

Visit your local home improvement store to get how-to advice from local experts.

## FAQ about garage remodels



Homeowners tend to want to maximize all of the space they have in their homes. For some this may involve turning a garage from a utilitarian space into one that serves multiple purposes.

According to The Mortgage Reports, a home-buying and improvement resource, garage renovations can increase the value of a home and add living space. Garage remodels can create additional storage space, provide an area for a home gym or even create room for a home office. Prior to beginning a garage remodel, homeowners may have some common questions about the process.

**How much does the renovation cost?**

Several factors will ultimately determine the final price of a garage remodel, but HomeAdvisor says the national average for a garage remodel falls between \$6,000 and \$26,000. Most homeowners come in at around \$15,000 for a total garage conversion.

**Will I recoup the investment?**

A garage conversion adds value to a home if it creates new and usable living space. The firm Cottage, which pulled together a team of builders, architects and technologists, advises the average garage conversion provides an 80 percent return on investment. That ROI varies depending on location.

**How can I upgrade the flooring?**

Garages traditionally feature concrete floors. Although durable, concrete floors can feel damp, hard and cold underfoot. Both vinyl plank and epoxy flooring options can elevate the design and functionality of the garage.

**Can I have the best of both worlds?**

Sometimes a garage needs to serve many purposes. Lofting the garage means a homeowner can still park cars or utilize the

lower space as a living area, all the while items are stored overhead. Some flip this design scenario and have the loft area as a bedroom or finished living space, while the lower portion remains a traditional garage area. Another thought is to finish only a portion of the garage. This works well for two- or three-car garages where there will be room to park a car and the remainder will serve another purpose.

**What are other ways to improve the garage?**

Installing more windows or improving on the lighting in the garage can be important. The garage improvement experts at Danley's say window installation enables people to circulate air in the garage without having to open the garage door. Improving the lighting means the garage can still be enjoyed or utilized after dark. Spread out lighting in the garage, and use a combination of overhead and task lighting just as one would in the home itself.

**How do I deter bugs or other pests from entering?**

Insects often want to hunker down in garages, and they may find it easy to get inside a garage. Keeping the garage clean and organized is the best way to deter pests and to spot infestations before they become problematic, indicates Mosquito Joe pest control company. Reducing water and humidity in the space, weatherproofing at the base of the garage door and other entry spots and utilizing insect repellents to make the garage less hospitable also can decrease the risk of insect infestation.

Remodeling a garage can add value and plenty of usable space to a home. Whether a garage houses cars or hosts neighborhood game night, a garage renovation can be well worth the investment.

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## 5 renovations that provide a strong return on investment

Renovations that make homeowners and residents of a home happy are always worth the investment. Though it's certainly true that projects that create more functional, usable space and add comfort and convenience are worth the price, such renovations are even more beneficial if they provide a good return on homeowners' financial investment. Returns are often cashed in when homeowners put their homes up for sale, and each year Remodeling magazine releases its "Cost vs. Value Report," which considers a wealth of data across the United States to determine which renovations return the highest percentage of homeowners' financial investment. According to the "2024 Cost vs. Value Report," the following are five projects that provide a strong return on investment (ROI).

1. Garage door replacement: The average job cost for this project is slightly more than \$4,500 but the project is valued at \$8,751, providing an especially high 194 percent ROI.

2. Steel door replacement: Remodeling magazine notes that a steel entry door replacement is worth double what it was worth in 2023. This project offers a 188 percent ROI on an average investment of \$2,355.

3. Manufactured stone veneer: A manufactured stone veneer is a man-made product that appears as if it's natural stone. Many homeowners prefer manufactured stone veneer to natural stone because of the price, as the former is less expensive and

easier to install, which means lower labor costs as well. The comparatively low cost of manufactured stone veneer is perhaps one reason why it averages a roughly 153 percent ROI on an average cost of just more than \$11,000.

4. Grand entrance upscale (fiberglass): Few things are as awe-inspiring as an impressive entryway, and upgrading to a grand fiberglass entrance door provides a 97 percent ROI. Components of these entryways can vary, but Remodeling magazine notes the project may entail removing an existing entry door and cutting and reframing the opening for a larger with dual sidelights.

5. Minor kitchen remodel: According to the "2024 U.S. Houzz & Home Study" from Houzz Research, kitchens were the most popular rooms to renovate in 2023. There's no denying the appeal of a newly renovated kitchen, and homeowners considering such a project may be happy to learn that a minor kitchen remodel that costs an average of around \$27,000 provides a 96 percent ROI. Bankrate.com notes that minor kitchen remodels typically keep the current kitchen design, size and layout intact, but these projects may involve painting walls, refreshing backsplash, replacing lighting and plumbing fixtures, and changing cabinet hardware and facades.

Home renovations that provide a significant ROI can make homeowners happy once a project is completed and even happier when the day comes to put a home up for sale.



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## How to manage humidity in your basement

**Excessive humidity in basements can lead to mold growth, musty odors and property damage. Prevention and remediation techniques are crucial for maintaining a healthy and comfortable environment. Here are some tips:**

- 1. Ensure proper ventilation by installing exhaust fans or regularly opening windows to allow air circulation and reduce humidity levels.**
- 2. Seal cracks and leaks in the foundation walls, floors, windows and doors to prevent moisture from seeping into the basement.**
- 3. Use a dehumidifier to control humidity levels during hot, muggy weather or in areas with high water tables.**
- 4. Add insulation to the basement walls and floors to prevent condensation and reduce moisture entering from the surrounding soil.**
- 5. Keep gutters and downspouts clean and debris-free to ensure they drain away from the foundation.**
- 6. Remove mold using a mixture of water and detergent. Hire a professional mold remediation service for extensive cases.**
- 7. Waterproof the basement walls and floors with sealants or coatings.**
- 8. Improve drainage by installing a sump pump to redirect groundwater from the basement.**
- 9. Monitor humidity levels with a hygrometer and take actions to maintain optimal levels (ideally between 30 and 50 percent). Contact a professional HVAC company or home renovation contractor for advice and help.**

## The benefits of residential solar energy



Solar energy panels have gained visibility in neighborhoods across the country. Where it once was a rarity to see solar panels on the roofs of homes, today a stroll or drive around a given community is bound to reveal a number of homeowners have made the transition to solar power. You may be wondering if the investment is worth it.

Solar panels harvest energy from the sun through the use of photovoltaic cells. These semiconductor materials absorb photons from the sun, and the photons release electrons from the atoms of the semiconductor material. According to Forbes, the flow of these electrons within the cell creates an electric current directed to circuits. Solar panels can be placed anywhere there is abundant sunlight, such as in open fields. In residential areas, they're most often placed on roofs to get the most sun exposure.

Although having solar panels on the roof may affect the aesthetic of a home, many people find the benefits far outweigh such issues. Consider these perks to going solar.

- **Save money:** One of the draws of solar power is the ability to save money on your monthly utility bill. Electricity costs seemingly rise year after year. The Solar Energy Industries Association® says the cost of solar has decreased by more than 70 percent in the past decade compared to the cost of electricity, which has risen about five percent. Over the course of a solar panel life span, which is typically between 25 and 30 years, it's possible to save \$25,500 to \$33,000 on electricity.

- **More affordable:** As noted, the cost of installing solar panels continues to drop. In-

vestopedia says up-front cost of a residential solar power system is between \$3,500 and \$16,000, depending on the size of the system. Energy.gov says the United States has extended the federal residential solar tax credit, and you can save a 30 percent tax credit on the cost of solar systems through January 1, 2033. Options abound for financing to make solar more affordable.

- **Increased home value:** According to the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, homeowners can increase the value of their homes by \$20 for every \$1 in savings on electrical bills from solar energy. Homes with solar panels sell 4 percent higher than those that don't have them.

- **Get paid back:** Solar incentives in some areas may enable homeowners to turn profits in addition to generating electric bill savings. Solar renewable energy credits compensate you for the electricity that the solar panel system generates.

- **Avoid disruptions in power:** Strong storms or even accidents that affect power lines can knock out traditional electricity for hours. Battery storage combined with solar energy can be beneficial during a disruption in power, and eliminate the need to purchase a backup generator.

- **Protect the planet:** Burning of fossil fuels to generate power contributes to carbon emissions. Switching to solar can reduce carbon emissions and help prevent air and water contamination.

Solar energy panels are becoming more visible in residential neighborhoods thanks in large parts to the many benefits such panels provide.



## 5 DIY home insulation tips for this fall and winter



As summer fades and the air gets crisp, keeping your home warm becomes a priority. Here are five DIY tricks to boost your home's insulation and keep the warmth in, saving you money on energy bills:

1. Seal the drafts. Drafty windows and doors are significant culprits for heat loss. Invest in weatherstrip or caulk to seal gaps. Make draft excluders from fabric tubes filled with rice or beans.
2. Think curtains. Thick curtains or blinds act as extra insulation. Look for thermal curtains with a lining that traps heat during the cold months.
3. Don't forget the floor. Drafty floors can make your house feel chilly,

especially for rooms above crawlspaces. If you have exposed floorboards, consider laying down rugs or insulating mats.

4. Maximize fireplace efficiency. If you have a fireplace, ensure the damper is closed when not in use. Open dampers act like vents, letting warm air escape.

5. Reflect the heat back in. During the day, open your curtains to let sunlight in. Sun naturally heats your space. At night, close the curtains to trap the warmth inside.

By following these simple DIY tips, you can make a big difference in keeping your home cozy and warm throughout the autumn and winter.

# Warning signs a bathroom needs work



Homeowners know that the work involved to maintain a home is never done. The end of one project has a tendency to roll into the planning of another, and so it goes for years on end.

Fortunate are the homeowners who get to choose when to begin a renovation project, but it's far more common that homeowners spot an issue and then realize it's time to renovate. When it comes to bathrooms, which can be among the more expensive spaces to renovate in a home, homeowners can keep an eye out for various signs suggesting the room needs a remodel.

- **Mold and mildew:** Mold and mildew is perhaps the most glaring sign a bathroom needs to be renovated or remodeled. Mold and mildew pose a notable threat to human health, as the United States Environmental Protection Agency reports that molds can cause allergic reactions. Individuals sensitive to mold may develop symptoms that mimic reactions to outdoor allergens like pollen, including sneezing, runny nose, red eyes, and dermatitis (skin rash). Mold also can trigger asthma attacks in people allergic to mold who have the condition. Mold can grow in poorly ventilated bathrooms, such as those without a fan or ones in which fans are not working properly. Mold and mildew will return if it's merely scrubbed away, so the underlying cause of mold must be addressed to prevent its return.

- **Small signs of fading:** Stains, peeling paint, cracked paint, and gaps in grout are small signs of fading that indicate a bathroom is in need of renovation if not a complete remodel. These issues also can serve

as warning signs of larger issues, such as water issues and structural problems, so they should not be merely written off as minor problems or eyesores.

- **Rising water bills:** Some signs a bathroom could use a little TLC are not necessarily confined to the room itself. If water bills are rising significantly and do not align with price increases or an uptick in water consumption, homeowners may have leaking pipes. Such pipes might be beneath a bathroom sink or behind tiled walls. Discoloration on the walls, peeling paint or wallpaper and/or a musty odor may indicate leaks inside a bathroom wall. If coupled with rising water bills, these signs could be indicative of a significant issue that requires immediate attention.

- **Issues with tiles:** Cracked or damaged tiles in the shower and bathtub or even on the floor are unsightly and also pose a safety hazard. Cracked floor tiles can lead to slips and falls, which can be especially harmful to older residents. And cracked tiles within the shower and tub area can indicate water problems behind the walls or general disrepair. Such issues should be addressed before they escalate into something larger.

- **A dated vibe:** Of course, some issues affecting a bathroom are not necessarily health or safety hazards but more an affront to homeowners' grasp of current styles and trends. If walking into a bathroom unintentionally feels like stepping backward into a bygone era, then it's probably time to consider a renovation or remodeling job.

Various signs can indicate to homeowners it's time to consider a bathroom renovation.

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# 6 signs you may need a new HVAC system

There's no place like home, especially when that home is a comfortable and safe haven. One of the ways residents find comfort in their homes is by maintaining the right indoor temperatures, which fluctuate along with the seasons. While there is much to be said about opening windows and doors to let Mother Nature do her thing, indoor comfort is often maintained with an HVAC system.

HVAC stands for heating, ventilation and air conditioning. It can include heat pumps, furnaces and air conditioning units. It is an automated system that works by adjusting a thermostat to regulate air temperature, and sometimes humidity, in the home. According to Enviguard, a commercial contracting provider, HVAC systems also may be used to improve indoor air quality through filtration and oxygen replacement.

As with any mechanical device, an HVAC system has a life span that must be considered. Should any of the following conditions be present, it is likely time to consult with an HVAC technician to see if repairs or replacement of the entire system is warranted.

## 1. Age

If the HVAC system is more than 10 years old, it could be time to begin budgeting for a new unit. Many modern, efficient systems may last 12 to 14 years with routine maintenance. But it's good to keep an HVAC system's age in mind so you can readily recognize when it might start to fail.

## 2. Longer or constant running times

An efficient, properly working system will quickly heat or cool the home and then turn off. A system that is turning on repeatedly or having to run for awhile before the set temperature is reached could be nearing the end of its utility.

## 3. Strange noises

Groaning, banging or loud humming noises should be addressed. While these noises may indicate that certain components need maintenance or replacement, they also could be symptoms of age and a system nearing failure.

## 4. Frequent repair visits

Knowing the HVAC company's repair person by name is a sign that the system has required too much work in recent months.



Repeated issues and repairs are probably signs that it's time to consider a system replacement.

## 5. Higher bills

Sticker shock when receiving electricity or gas bills likely mean the HVAC system isn't working efficiently and might need to be replaced.

## 6. Poor indoor air quality

If the home is dusty or humid or even if allergies seem to have cropped up out of nowhere, this could indicate a poorly functioning HVAC system.

HVAC systems are vital to keeping indoor environments comfortable and safe. Such systems may exhibit certain signs that indicate they need to be replaced.

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